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The state's controversial planned route for the South Mountain Freeway would take out three mountain ridges, 184 houses, a church and several apartment complexes.

Now two members of Congress are urging state officials to find a less-disruptive way to build Loop 202, which would connect Chandler to Laveen.

"Clearly the connection is needed," said U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, a Democrat from southern Oregon who chairs the House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit. "The question is how disruptive the (state's) preferred alignment will be."

DeFazio and U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell, the Tempe Democrat, toured the 22-mile planned freeway route with members of the Arizona Department of Transportation on Monday.

Since December, Mitchell has urged ADOT and the Gila River Indian Community, which owns flat, undeveloped land immediately south of the area in question, to move the South Mountain corridor to tribal land.

He said he expects the tribe and ADOT to start to work together on a new freeway route that would not involve leveling neighborhoods or mountain ranges within the next few weeks.

Original plans for the South Mountain route were drawn up in the 1980s, before Ahwatukee Foothills and Laveen became heavily populated residential areas.

DeFazio said it is not all that unusual for state highway departments to draw up plans for freeways, shelve them for a decade or more because of funding or other issues, then have to rework them because of development or other changes along the freeway route.

Congressmen urge plans for less-intrusive South Mountain Freeway route

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"Engineers and transportation planners come up with ideas that are relevant at a certain time," DeFazio said. "What often happens is that plans are shelved. Then when they pull them out and blow the dust off of them, they find that things have changed."